TL 1726

Asia & Pacific

❑ Tibet

On 25 May 1994, a meeting between Tibetan Parliamentarians in exile and NGOs took place at the UNPO office in the Netherlands. Pax Christi Netherlands was represented by C. Wiebering and L. van Kessel. On 6 June, E. De Jonghe, international secretary, and Jan ter Laak, secretary PC Netherlands, met the Dalai Lama.

❑ East Timor

On 22 July 1994, Pax Christi International endorsed a letter of CIIR (Catholic Institute for International Relations) which was sent to Cardinal R. Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Council Justitia & Pax. CIIR expresses its concern regarding the attacks on two nuns, the attempts on the life of Bishop Belo, and the occupation of the University of East Timor.

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Lita Velmonte of PC Philippines attended the (controversial) Asia-Pacific-East Timor Conference, APCET, which took place in June 1994 in Manila (see also Newsletter Nr. 27). Kevin McBride, PC New Zealand, and Renato Stefani, PC Japan, also attended the conference. As a follow-up to this Conference, Pax Christi Philippines will start up a working-group on East Timor.

Balkan & Central Europe

❑ Letzebuerg fir Sarajevo

The bombing of Sarajevo began on 5 April 1992. The whole town of about 300,000 inhabitants was besieged by the Bosnian Serb army. With the passage of time people became accustomed to living with the constant threat of shelling from the surrounding hills and sniper fire from snipers installed in blocks of flats on the edge of town.

This tragic situation continued for two years and left thousands of Sarajevo inhabitants dead or in hospital, many permanently crippled. Many people, both young and old, committed suicide, as they could see no escape from their living hell. Furthermore, several thousand graves bear witness to the innocent children of Sarajevo, sacrificed to war's barbarity.

Ernad Durovic lived in the midst of this barbarity for a whole year. In April 1993 he decided to flee from the besieged town and found a home in Luxembourg. Before hostilities began he was a musician / composer well-known in Sarajevo and ex-Yugoslavia. He decided to continue to fight in Luxembourg for the liberation of the Bosnian people and the model multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society which characterised Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war.

He decided to launch an awareness-raising campaign in Luxembourg with

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ticipate in the programme together with local coordinators. EMPSA teams worked closely with church networks and with local NGOs. The mandate of EMPSA peace monitors has always been to actively mediate and facilitate the peace process, at both local and national levels. They were placed in violence-torn communities in regions like Natal, PWV, Eastern Cape and Bophuthatswana.

In the pre-election period and during the actual elections EMPSA presence drastically increased to a total of 340 international peace monitors. Upon arrival in Johannesburg the group was divided into teams of four or five persons who worked with a South African coordinator who often came from local churches.

The nature of the activities of EMPSA monitors depended strongly on the situation in the area where the teams were placed. No clear picture of the tasks could be given beforehand and this meant that often an appeal was made to use ones creativity and flexibility. In the region of Natal for instance, where Wies Kalsbeek was stationed, the situation before the elections was very tense because of IFP's (*Inkatha Freedom Party*) long kept opposition to participate in the elections. Intimidation and fear of local communities made it a dangerous undertaking to go to townships to assess the situation.

There were cases where team coordinators, who were not seen as neutral by IFP supporters, were threatened with violence. These threats also affected their families. Examining of some issues such as voter education, installation of voting stations, access to voter cards was nearly impossible until 19 April, when IFP decided to join the elections.

The experiences of Margot Mulders, who was placed in the Vaal Triangle (PWV area), were very different. Vaal Triangle had been the focus of some of the worst conflicts over the years - from the Sharpville massacre in 1960 to the Boippatong massacre in 1992. But in the past four to six months there had been a great degree of peace. Although it was an uneasy peace, parties had negotiated their differences. This made it relatively easy for the monitors to move around freely. They were impressed and inspired by the spirit of the people of South Africa, who decided to cast their votes and make these elections a peaceful transition to democracy.

To be part of the EMPSA programme was a privilege for both of them. EMPSA has shown to be a successful ecumenical model of monitoring. The experiences of the programme in South Africa deserve to be examined. Lessons can be drawn for critical situations in other countries.